

***“Reducing the Paperwork Burden on the Public: Are Agencies Doing All They Can?”***

**Opening Statement of Chairman Candice S. Miller**

**Subcommittee on Regulatory Affairs**

**Committee on Government Reform**

**Tuesday, June 14, 2005, 2:00 p.m.**

**Room 2247 Rayburn House Office Building**

Good afternoon. The Subcommittee on Regulatory Affairs will come to order. I would like to welcome everyone to today's hearing on the efforts of Federal agencies to reduce the paperwork burden imposed on the public.

Today's hearing is the second by this subcommittee regarding the public burden imposed by Federal agencies. On May 25<sup>th</sup>, we examined efforts within the Internal Revenue Service to reduce the burden on taxpayers.

The IRS may account for roughly 80 percent of the paperwork burden, but there are many more agencies that force individuals and businesses

to take considerable amounts of time filling out forms and complying with regulations.

Excluding the Department of Treasury, the Federal government imposes nearly 1.6 **billion** hours of burden on the public—with five agencies imposing more than 100 million hours of burden. Much of the information collected by Federal agencies is unnecessary and extremely burdensome, and agencies need to do a better job ensuring their necessary functions are not unnecessarily burdensome.

In response to increases in government-imposed burden, Congress passed the Paperwork Reduction Act in 1980, known as the PRA. However, the burden imposed on the

public has continued to increase throughout the years. Congress amended the PRA in 1995 and established burden reduction goals of 10 or 5 percent for the first five years of its enactment. Furthermore, the 1995 PRA set annual paperwork reduction goals that reduced burden thereafter to the “maximum practicable opportunity.”

Despite the intent of Congress, burden has not decreased. The non-Treasury paperwork burden now exceeds 1996 levels and is projected to increase even further. Congress has not been without blame. According to OMB, the non-Treasury burden has increased by nearly 85 million hours over the past three years because of statutorily-required program

changes. In a post-9/11 world, many new regulations are necessary to ensure the safety of the nation; and Congress has passed several laws that have increased burden.

However, Federal agencies as a whole have **not** done an adequate job reducing burden in areas under their discretion. In fact, discretionary agency actions—and not statutes passed by Congress—have increased the non-Treasury paperwork burden imposed on the public by 51 million hours during the past three years.

We are pleased to have the Chief Information Officers of the Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of Labor, and the

Department of Transportation with us today. Together, these three agencies account for over 557 million hours of burden. To put this figure into perspective, 279,000 employees would have to spend 40 hours per week, 50 weeks per year filling out paperwork just for these three agencies.

Without question, the task of reducing burden is a difficult one; and our witnesses will likely attest to that. But the term “customer service” should not be foreign to Federal agencies. The intent of Congress was very clear when it passed the 1995 PRA: Since burden is imposed by an agency, it is the agency’s responsibility to minimize that burden.

We are also pleased to have Linda Koontz of the Government Accountability Office with us today. Her testimony will provide the Subcommittee vital insights into efforts by Federal agencies to reduce burden through compliance with the Paperwork Reduction Act and beyond what is required by law. In preparation for this hearing, Chairman Tom Davis and I requested the GAO to assess agency compliance with the PRA.

The GAO concluded that, government-wide, agency CIOs generally reviewed information collections and certified they met the standards outlined by the Paperwork Reduction Act. However, its analysis showed that CIOs

certified collections even though support for these standards was often missing or partial.

This is highly troubling because without support from agencies showing the standards are met, Congress and the public cannot be confident that the highest degree of attention was focused on minimizing burden.

I want to thank each of our witnesses today. I look forward to your testimony. The Subcommittee hopes to understand the processes agencies have instituted to not only ensure compliance with the PRA, but also what is being done to minimize the burden imposed on the public.

Every hour spent by an individual or business completing paperwork for the Federal government is an hour of loss productivity. An excessive and unnecessary burden imposed on individuals and businesses hurts job creation and harms our competitiveness in a global economy. America's businesses should have the confidence that our government is doing all it can to promote economic expansion. I fear that this is not the case and that the opposite is true—government is hurting businesses.

Thank you. I would now like to recognize the distinguished Ranking Member of the Subcommittee, Congressman Stephen Lynch, for his opening remarks.